

CALAVERAS HOPES SOMEDAY TO CREATE AN INDEPENDENT PARKS DISTRICT

VOTERS WOULD LIKELY HAVE TO OK A \$3 A MONTH TAX

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SAN ANDREAS - Calaveras County will someday have an independent, standalone parks district if a majority of the county's Board of Supervisors has its way.

Board members said during a workshop with members of the county's Parks and Recreation Commission that creating a district separate from county government would be the best way to protect parks from the financial woes of the county and also offers the best hope that the parks district could win voter approval for a parcel tax to support park construction and maintenance.

Right now, the county owns a number of parcels dedicated by developers for use as parks but has allowed those sites to remain weed-filled lots. And county officials also were unable to do the necessary planning to spend \$1.2 million in the Proposition 40 park bond California voters passed in 2002. It was only when a number of volunteers stepped forward that the paperwork was completed to allow ball fields, sports complexes and other work to be done before a Dec. 31, 2010, deadline.

"The county cannot absorb doing this anymore," Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Merita Callaway said at the workshop this week.

Calaveras County has no parks district, no parks department and only one incorporated city - Angels Camp - that can take care of its own needs. The rest of the county is served by a patchwork of parks operated by volunteers, community groups, a local district in San Andreas and veterans memorial districts in several other communities.

Callaway and Supervisors Russ Thomas and Steve Wilensky all said they favored creating a separate, independent parks district.

Supervisor Tom Tryon disagreed, saying it is county government's responsibility to plan land use and that parks are a key part of that.

"I don't see any reason to establish another independent, special district," Tryon said.

Tryon did join the board majority to say that he agrees that a parcel tax only on lots that are developed is an appropriate way to fund park construction and maintenance.

Supervisor Gary Tofanelli said he did not yet know whether he would support an independent park district, and wanted first to check in with the leaders of the Jenny Lind Veterans District and the San Andreas Recreation and Park District. Both entities operate within Tofanelli's supervisorial district.

Mason Goodale, chairman of the Calaveras County Parks and Recreation Commission, said a parcel tax adequate to operate a parks district would likely cost no more than \$3 a month per family when spread over all the residential properties in the county.

Goodale noted that the agency could only be formed and funded through a parcel tax if it wins a two-thirds supermajority from county voters. And he noted that the tax could never be increased unless voters again gave approval.

"This is not creating another government agency that can come in and grab your wallet," Goodale said.

Goodale also said the parks district would be designed to provide support - whether money or technical assistance - to existing parks groups, but would not replace them.

"This is not a plan to take over recreation in Calaveras County," Goodale said.

A majority of the Board of Supervisors warned Goodale that he should wait a year or two before taking the commission's proposal to voters.

"I think the chances of having the citizens pass that in this environment are somewhere between nil and none," Tryon said.

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